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TWO UNPUBLISHED LISZT LETTERS TO MOSONYI

By BÉLA BARTÓK¹

THE economic distress produced by the War in Central Europe has compelled many formerly well-to-do collectors of literary and musical rarities to throw them on the public market or at least to draw public attention to them for the purpose of finding a purchaser. The two hitherto unpublished letters by Franz Liszt belong to this category and form part, together with two unimportant letters of Richard Wagner, of the collection of Mr. *E. Z.*

The first of the two Liszt letters—both in German—was undoubtedly and the second very probably written by Liszt to his Hungarian compatriot, Michael Mosonyi (1817–1870). Presumably some of the readers of *THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY* have seen the group-picture with Richard Wagner as the central figure, in which Mosonyi attracts the eye by virtue of his native costume. It is not likely that Mosonyi as a composer, was esteemed in strictly Wagnerian circles as highly as he was by Liszt who in 1857 intended to perform Mosonyi's German opera "Maximilian" in Weimar, evidently the opera alluded to in the letter of April 29, 1857. The project came to naught, because Liszt insisted on some changes, whereupon Mosonyi withdrew the score. On the whole, his operas and other compositions remained even in his day confined to Hungary and to-day Mosonyi is practically forgotten as a composer. At the time of Liszt's letter, Mosonyi apparently still adhered to his more German sounding name, Brand.

This letter is eminently characteristic of Franz Liszt. Publicly he certainly was not in the habit of extolling the merits of his works, nor of smarting under the frequent attacks on his works by the opponents of the "Neu-deutsche Schule" who saw in him a brilliant piano virtuoso but an impotent composer and moreover resented his championship of Richard Wagner. Liszt's proudly modest "Ich kann warten" when a disciple of his expressed his

¹When preparing editorially these prefatory remarks for the printer, I also took the liberty of correcting, in accordance with the indications of the esteemed leader among contemporary Hungarian composers, certain names in Liszt's original text. For instance Rózsavölgyi instead of Liszt's presumably phonetic Rosavögly.—*Ed.*



F. Loh

H. Pohl

H. v. Kossel

Gusparini

Billow

Jensen

Gille

Drasche

A. Ritter

Danuvosch

Forzes

Mosonyi

Röckel

R. Wagner

1895

indignation over the public indifference of the master's symphonic poems has become famous. The letter to Mosonyi, however, reveals that Liszt, without relinquishing his attitude of *grand seigneur*, in the privacy of his correspondence could show quite human signs of impatience, irritation and disgust. And on the other hand, that he took an equally human pride in his own works, in this case the "Graner Fest Messe" so-called, the mass which he composed (1855) for the dedication of the Cathedral at Gran.

If this letter is of some importance for the history of this famous "Missa solemnis," the second letter, probably also written to Mosonyi, gives us a deeper insight into the history of his "Legende der heiligen Elisabeth." Inasmuch as he says that the score was finished "six weeks ago," September, 1862, would be the date of this undated letter.

From this letter it becomes quite evident that and why Liszt considered the "Legende der heiligen Elisabeth" a contribution to "modern Hungarian music" as much as his previous symphonic poem "Hungaria." Cosmopolitan though he was, he never ceased to consider himself at heart "Hungarian."

The remark about his "answer to Vörösmarty" will become clear if the reader remembers that Vörösmarty (1800-1855) was one of Hungary's greatest poets and in 1846 addressed an Ode to Liszt, which in Breitkopf and Härtel's edition of Liszt's complete works, is prefixed to the symphonic poem "Hungaria."

If Liszt in 1862 for the reasons mentioned in his letter could not accept the call to associate himself with the Budapest Conservatory, no such obstacles seem to have prevented him in 1875 to "get in closer touch again with Hungary." In that year he accepted the directorate of the newly founded national "Ungarische Musik Akademie" and since then spent every year about three months in Budapest as the head of the institute.

I

FRANZ LISZT TO MOSONYI

Highly esteemed friend:

It was as a skilled, richly endowed and capable musician and fellow-artist that I first learned to know and appreciate you; and since I have now come to cherish you as a friend, I feel that we are united by ties of affection. Your letter was a source of varied pleasure: first, I was glad to know that you had nearly completed your opera, and that you had finished the work without any contemptible and cowardly concessions, in accordance with your most serious convictions. This is the only road to art: that which leads from the true to the beautiful and elevated, without false hypocrisy or bargaining—Bravo, Brand! I look on you as a

good, honest fellow, an honor to this Ödenburg County of ours! Hold fast to this admirable manner of thinking and acting; since, as you are not lacking in the ability to *do* things, success is sure to crown your efforts, sooner or later. I shall take uncommon interest in going through your opera with you from A to Z, and I shall hold you to your promise to give me this pleasure at the beginning of September, in Weimar. On September third, fourth and fifth, Carl August's jubilee will be celebrated here, and probably some of my mixed compositions (the "Faust" symphony and others) will be performed. I will send you the program and a special invitation later. So come to the festival, and we will then *at once* make all arrangements for the performance of your opera by the end of this year. It goes without saying that you are to take up your quarters with me, where you can work quite undisturbed if you are so minded. You will also meet your poet, Pasqué, with whom I am on quite a friendly footing, in Weimar (as stage manager).

Your letter also contains a strikingly correct criticism of the situation which my many-headed, though, in most cases, most brainless opposition creates for me. If we look at the whole matter calmly, things must happen as they do, since it is just in the course of this fermentation that good matter is separated from the dross. As was the case in the kingdom of Denmark, something in our musical system of management has grown "rotten," the only difference being that, unlike Hamlet, we do not want to allow ourselves to be murdered by "fair Rosenkranz" and "gentle Guildenstern," the truth of the matter being that we really have nothing to do with these busy people; and their impotence, their anger and their envy cannot wound us in the least. When we meet again I can tell you a number of similar incidents which will amuse you—regarding Prague as well, where, as everywhere else, there is no lack of gossip and twaddle. As a document of more than consolatory value for me as regards the attacks to which I have been exposed for years, and will still be exposed for years to come, I am sending you by mail, through Rózsavölgyi [the publisher], a few copies of Richard Wagner's letter. Will you be so kind as to pay Rózsavölgyi the small postal charge involved, since it is safer for me to send the package unstamped, and to distribute a few copies in my name to Baron Anguss, Count Ráday, Doppler, Erkel, and Rózsavölgyi himself. The comparison of the swords with the hilts has been expressed in this letter in a masterly way. Zellner has only printed it in part, but the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in Leipsic published the entire letter in the issue which appeared at Easter.

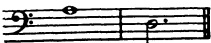
You, esteemed friend, will not be dissatisfied, I hope, with the changes, facilitations and additions which I have carried out in the last revision of my Mass:



becomes still more elevated, and the final fugues in the *Gloria* and the *Credo* have not been cast in the usual Sechter¹ mold! The leading motive of the *Agnus Dei*, too, now stands out more independently in the *double-*

¹Simon Sechter, 1788–1867, the theorist.—*Ed.*

basses (in your honor!) and the whole thing closes with the motive of the

Credo,  which produces an impression of entire unity,

psychic as well as musical. At the performance in Pest, of all by far the most successful, (between ourselves the folk at Prague were too insufficient, the chorus too small, and many among those taking part too little acquainted with the work), I felt that there was something missing there at the close; but not until later, when I had a second copy made, did I find something which I could use. I hope that the score will be printed not later than September, and then you can take it along when you leave here. As regards an intended performance of the Mass in Vienna, my information thus far has come only from newspaper reports.

Do not forget to send me those Hungarian [things of yours]¹ as soon as they appear, as well as the choruses which you have composed to greet Their Majesties. I am eagerly looking forward to your latest works.

My tiresome illness, which forces me to keep to my bed for a few days, because I had left it at too early a time, prevents my furnishing a contribution to Rózsavölgyi's album. I will, however, keep the promise I made Rózsavölgyi, later, when during the course of the summer I once more find myself in the mood to write a serviceable piano piece for him. My orchestral composition, which I am minded to lay aside this year for some time to come, since I have already produced sufficient orchestra music during the past four or five years, now takes up my attention so fully and completely that I can find time for no other work.

On May 15th, I am going to Aachen, which will give a number of domestic and foreign papers an opportunity to revile me. Turanyi visited me here, and after what you had written him concerning me, he appears to be very amicably inclined toward me, so that I am able to count with certainty on a most friendly understanding with him as regards the whole music festival.

Winterberger will probably come to Aachen, and I will deliver your greetings to him there, which will be sure to please him. He has established himself for the entire winter in Rotterdam, where he is quite comfortable. He gave a couple of concerts there together with Singer, who was making a Dutch concert tour.

My excellent and admirable Gross sends his best thanks for your kindly remembrance of him, and will be only too glad to trumpet forth your praises loudly when you bring us your opera. The day before yesterday I saw him playing double-bass in an *ent'acte*, something which he manages to do quite passably.

Once more my heartiest thanks, my esteemed friend, for your kind letter, and till we meet again at the beginning of September—regardless of all “illwishers,” who, like pestilential parasitical plants, make a nuisance of themselves everywhere—let our watchword be: Labor and nobility of thought; and our aim—to serve Art faithfully.

Sincerely your devoted friend,

Weimar, April 29, 1857.

F. Liszt.

Send me your exact address when next you write.

¹Words to that effect apparently missing in the original.—*Ed.*

II

FRANZ LISZT TO MOSONYI (?)

My esteemed friend:

Since I have but this moment written down your name *to be printed*, it seems quite natural for me to write you personally. I am sure that you will hold neither the one nor the other fact against me. I will inform you, first of all, how the incident came about. To the score of the "Legend of Saint Elizabeth," which I finished six weeks ago, I am adding an extended annotation, and am quoting the Plain Song chant of *in festo Santa Elizabeth*:



and that of the Hungarian church song "To Saint Elizabeth," from the seventeenth century:



both of which reached me, thanks to your friendly solicitude and good offices. The Plain Song chant forms the leading motive of the "Legend of St. Elizabeth," and the church song (*Cantico de S. Elizabetha, Hungariæ Regis Filis*), appears in connection with the works of charity, immediately before the death of the saint. Matray was obliging enough to write out the entire song for me. It is to be printed exactly in accordance with his autograph handwriting, as a supplement to the score, in which I shall also express my most sincere thanks to the Arch-abbot of Martinsberg, Michael von Rimeli, the Baron von Anguss, the Reverend Father Maurus Czinn (Librarian of the Abbey of Martinsberg), and our admirable Father Guardian of the Franciscans in Pest (whose exact name I beg you will write me when opportunity offers).

As to the work itself, I can only inform you that it is divided into choruses and solos, and contains six numbers complete in themselves, yet interconnected, as follows: 1. The Arrival of Elizabeth in the Wartburg (the Hungarian magnate who accompanies her enters at the very beginning). 2. The Miracle of the Roses. 3. The Knights of the Cross. 4. The Landgravine Sophie—Elizabeth is driven from Wartburg. 5. Elizabeth's Prayer—Chorus of the Poor—Her Death. 6. Solemn Interment of the Saint by Frederick II, the Hohenstauffen. To this must be added the orchestral introduction with the leading motive (E flat, already announced), treated in light and melodic fugal style; as well as a few completed instrumental movements, such as the "March of the Crusade" and an "Interlude" (after No. 5). The time of performance will be, in all, two and a half hours; hence the work will furnish an entire evening concert. Should my wish be realized, this work will, later on, form an integral contribution to a *new Hungarian musical literature*. I think I have already given my answer to Vörösmarty with my symphonic poem, *Hungaria*. Yet there still remain several things for me to say, irrespective as to whether they may be quickly understood and recognized;

some time, when I am no longer on this earth, the rest will find itself. I can calmly await the event while I *go on working*, and meanwhile composedly expiate my virtuoso reputation with the disapproval my compositions have excited.

You know my thoughts in this connection, esteemed friend, and will not take it amiss that I continue to follow my "higher aims" in full career.

In the course of the past few days a special surprise has been my portion. I received a very friendly letter, in the name of the Pest Conservatory, and signed by Baron Pronay, in which I am invited to visit Pest. Unfortunately it is impossible for me to leave Rome this winter, and for the time being I was obliged to excuse myself as best I could to Baron Pronay. Yet omittance is no acquittance; it is mainly a question for which reason, and under which conditions I am to go there. My personal position would have to be carefully considered. The centre of gravity for my musical activity has for several years most decidedly been in my compositions, whose interests at present I can further best and most comfortably in Rome. In addition my obligations as regards the Grand-Duke at Weimar have not ceased.

Quite a while ago the Grand-Duke excused me from all duties connected with my position as conductor, and only last year, shortly before my departure, he made me one of his chamberlains. In accordance with the promise I gave him, and which the Grand-Duke recalls in the most friendly manner in his letters to me, I am pledged, as soon as I leave Rome, to establish myself for the time being in Weimar. I also intend to spend several weeks there next summer and perhaps, if circumstances seem to warrant, to have a performance of "St. Elizabeth" given *at the Wartburg*.

If at an earlier date, say five or six years ago, the matter of conceding me a sphere of activity in Pest had been thought of, it would have been much easier for me, to be frank, to make my arrangements accordingly. Yet I bear them not the slightest ill will because they did not know what they were to think of me, and what they were to do with me. . . .

Most of my acquaintances do not even know to this very day. Only, I must now consider very carefully as regards the acceptance of any proposals, and to what extent I may allow myself to share in them and assume responsibilities. After having directed more than thirty different orchestras, and, especially in Weimar, having functioned as a conductor for full ten years (from '48 to '58), my career as an orchestral leader has also come to an end; although less acceptably than my career as a virtuoso, which I brought to a close once and for all in the year '47, since which time I do not play in public. Possibly, however, sooner or later, something will turn up—perhaps a task like that involved in the Gran Mass—which would once more bring me nearer to Hungary. Then I will gladly come (to Pest), and can promise you that I shall bring along no worthless *occasional* music.

Let me hear from you soon, esteemed friend, with regard to your musical labors and, if possible, send me some of your later compositions. In all probability I shall still pass several winters in Rome: do you keep me company mentally in an agreeable and interesting fashion by means of

your works. You know that I shall meet them with an open ear and a sympathetic mind, in which I remain as ever, with sincere sympathy and esteem,

Your devoted friend,

F. Liszt.

P.S. Since but few people are able or inclined to read my scores, I seldom offer them to anyone. However, esteemed friend, should you be able to find time for reading of the sort, I should take pleasure in sending you (through friend Brendel in Leipsic) the "Faust" symphony and the last three symphonic poems to appear.

Will you be so kind as to either give the enclosed letter to Herr von Anguss personally, or else see that it is *sure* to reach him? I do not know where he is at the moment, and am desirous that he have some news of me. In your next letter will you please remember to set down your correct address.

(Translated by Frederick H. Martens.)